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Written by

[Goitsewang Matlabe](#)

Goitsewang Matlabe

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Alleged ‘tender mess’ at Home Affairs under fire



A tender mess is playing out at the Department of Home Affairs. Picture: Armand Hough. African News Agency (ANA)

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A tender mess is playing out at the Department of Home Affairs. Sources inside the department have exclusively revealed to *The Star* what is alleged to be a corrupt tender worth hundreds of millions of rand at the department.

The Auditor-General of South Africa (AGSA) and the parliamentary portfolio committee have blasted the continuous extension of the Visa Facilitation Services (VFS) Global tender with the Department of Home Affairs as illegal. The seemingly “evergreen contract” seems to be going against President Cyril Ramaphosa’s efforts cleanse corruption within government departments.

VFS is currently under investigation in both the UK and Nigeria in connection with serious allegations of bribery and corruption.

VFS Global, which according to its website claims to be the world's largest visa outsourcing and technology services specialist for governments and diplomatic missions worldwide, operates from 14 offices within South Africa as well as having a presence in 18 countries with 45 visa centres in executing the contract.

The parliamentary portfolio committee on home affairs and the AGSA have declared the original tender awarded to the company as illegal.

Both parties reprimanded the Department of Home Affairs, instructing the department to correct the tender and stop forging ahead with continuous extensions of the contract.

The existing contract for VFS has been in the works since 2018 and has been extended a few times, allegedly because of the close proximity of VFS to senior departmental and government officials.

“They have also claimed to have a new female BEE partner who is believed to have serious political connections that would further consolidate their incumbency in Home Affairs and across South Africa’s government agencies.

“They make us believe that without them the passport department would collapse. This is the way they instil fear. They are in cahoots with our officials. They have plainly ignored the fact that the tender has been declared illegal,” a source said.

Some of the arguments to be relied upon by VFS are that the current specifications for the tender did not indicate stand-alone or shared infrastructure, giving them a better understanding than their competitors.

To make matters worse, it is believed that VFS was the only company privy to the exact size of the market and was intentionally sharing incorrect information with Home Affairs.

Another avenue it will be taking advantage of is that the financial status of the winning bidder was not required in this window, which opened the window for manipulation afterwards, especially considering that price constituted 90% of the award.

VFS used the South African Social Security Agency (Sassa) tender change management debacle to further motivate for the 12-month extension yet again despite the warning from the portfolio committee.

Home Affairs officials were very cagey with answers last night. The department's deputy director-general of finance, Gordon Hollamby, said he was not authorised to engage on media enquiries and said enquiries should be channelled to the departmental spokesperson.

VFS was not available for comment at the time of going to print.

Home Affairs spokesperson Siya Qoza said: "The way you have crafted the questions suggests to me that you are aware that I would need to get the responses from relevant colleagues. I suppose that you are aware that such a request borders on being unreasonable."

However, when [The Star](#) contacted the Home Affairs deputy director-general for counter-corruption and security, advocate Constance Moitse, she said: "I'm not at work, I'm on holiday in Sun City. Speak to my deputy or the spokesperson."

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goitsemanq.matlhabe@inl.co.za